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REPORT ON

COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMISSION

HEARINGS

ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN

THE BALTIMORE CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

AND

THE COMMUNITY

OCTOBER 19 & 20, 1978

Commissioners:

Antonia Keane - Chairperson
Julian Morgan - Vice Chairperson
Elizabeth Shipley - Secretary
George Bereska
Leonard Butler
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FORWARD

The Community Relations Commission is empowered to enforce Article 4 of the Baltimore City Code which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, religion, national origin, ancestry, physical and mental disability and age. Duties of the Commission include receiving and investigating complaints of discriminatory acts directed against persons in the city and formulating and carrying out "a comprehensive educational and action program designed to eliminate and prevent prejudice . . ."¹

¹Baltimore City Code art.4, sec. 16, par. 1 (1976).

INTRODUCTION

This report of the Findings of the Community Relations Commission concerning the relationship between the Baltimore City Police Department and the community consists of two parts: first, an objective compilation and condensation of the most frequently expressed concerns, both oral and written, of citizens and police officers; second, a compendium of recommendations made by members of the Community Relations Commission, a number of citizens, an independent firm of consultants and a group of legal researchers.

Among the powers and duties assigned to the Community Relations Commission is the conducting of "investigations and studies"² and the holding of "public hearings for the purpose of determining the existence of problems, practices, or conditions"³ which affect areas involved with Article 4. The Commission has had a long-standing interest in seeing such problem areas addressed and rectified wherever possible. Areas of concern include eliminating tension in communities, assisting neighborhoods in obtaining government sponsored services, lessening the spread of dangerous rumors, etc. Due to the interest of members of the Commission in working to eliminate problem areas and to enhance a positive atmosphere

²Ibid, sec. 14, par. 7.

³Ibid.

in the city, staff, in 1973, requested that the Commission authorize it to return as a member of the Police Department's Complaint Evaluation Board. This authority was granted by the Commission in February, 1974.

Our interest in police matters became known throughout the Baltimore community and resulted in a number of individuals and groups of citizens coming to the Commission alleging misconduct and overreaction on the part of various police officers. The reaction of the Commission resulted in a decision to hold public hearings for the purpose of assessing the relationship between the Police Department and the community of Baltimore. The hearings, which were held on October 19th and 20th of 1978, were an attempt to gain further details about the nature and extent of the problem, and to arrive at recommendations for possible solutions.

To accomplish this goal, the Commission recognized the need to hear from as wide a spectrum of citizens as possible and to also hear from the Police Department itself.

REPORT ON HEARINGS INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
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AND THE COMMUNITY

Hearing Format

On Thursday, October 18, 1978, citizens who had expressed a desire to give live testimony were allowed five minutes each to make a presentation to the members of the Commission. The 32 persons who gave testimony were representatives of the citizenry in relation to age, race, sex, ideologies and economic status.

On Friday, October 20, 1978, representatives of various levels of the Police Department, staff of the State's Attorney's Office and members of Police Councils presented testimony.

Problem Identification

After careful analysis of both the oral and written testimony, Commission members have concluded that, in an overall sense, the Baltimore City Police Department is performing in an effective manner; but that the Department is in need of certain changes which can increase that effectiveness and improve the Department's relationship with the citizens for whom they are to provide a service.

Areas of Concern

The areas of concern by the community during the hearings include the following:

1. Citizens perceive that they are mistreated by some members of the police force. They also believe that many more people are mistreated but are unable or unwilling to complain or believe that complaining is futile.
2. Some citizens, especially poor and black persons, believe that they have been brutalized by members of the police force.
3. Although the Administration of the Police Department recognizes that there are "problem officers," no real action seems to take place to deal with such persons.
4. Police Department personnel lack adequate training in intergroup relations and pluralistic cultural lifestyles.
5. Some Police Council Meetings are highly restrictive and programmed to appear to be positive and effective.
6. There is no viable mechanism that allows for meaningful dialogue between police personnel and citizens.
7. There appears to be a problem of inability and unwillingness to address citizen concerns on the part of segments of the Police Department's leadership.
8. The media is evidently not interested in publicizing positive aspects of police/community relations.
9. Citizens believe that police officers resort to maximum force at times when less force would be effective.

10. Citizens believe that they do not have adequate input into the complaint process employed by the Complaint Evaluation Board (CEB).
11. Complainants do not receive adequate detailed information at the conclusion of the IID and CEB processes.

Concerns expressed by police personnel, police wives and members of police councils included the following:

1. Police Officers are underpaid.
2. Although one act of brutality is too many and should be addressed, it was acknowledged that some of the acts are provoked by citizens.
3. Citizen expectations of the performance of the average police officer are unrealistic.

Recommendations

1. The need for training - The staff of an agency becomes more effective as appropriate training is provided. On-going intergroup relations training is essential if the relationship between police and community is to be positive.

Officers should constantly be made aware of resources in the community to which they can turn for assistance. They should have access to, and perhaps be required to participate in, courses designed to enhance their sensitivity and give them a better understanding of the various outlooks and life styles of people in the city's various communities.

The need for effective crowd control techniques is on-going in any urban area such as Baltimore City.

An oft-repeated area of concern involves the feeling by many citizens that officers use a greater degree of force than is necessary in many situations. To help combat this situation, continuous training should be provided in alternate methods of subduing offenders.

Overall, the Commission believes that appropriate training can lead to a force that has an understanding of the people with which it interacts and of its role in protecting both life and property.

2. Improving the relationship between the Community Relations Commission and the Baltimore City Police Department - The Community Relations Commission recognizes the importance of a viable working relationship between this Commission, and our staff, and the Police Department Administration and its working force. One way in which this can be accomplished involves more frequent and substantive dialogue between the Police Commissioner, the members of this Commission, appropriate members of our staff and the staff of the Police Department. At such sessions, concerns should be shared and solutions sought.

A positive relationship between our departments should result in a unified approach to the news media with one goal being to educate the public as to the proper procedures for filing complaints, how the IID process functions, the rights and responsibilities of citizens as related to law enforcement agencies, realistic expectations of police officers, etc.

3. The investigation process within the Police Department as related to citizen complaints - Study should be made as to the feasibility of creating a more independent investigatory body to deal with complaints by citizens of police misconduct.

Whatever the process, citizens should be given a detailed explanation of the investigatory process. Results and findings should also be presented in a detailed and personalized form rather than using a standardized letter. In instances in which cases are dismissed, a detailed explanation of the reasons for the dismissal should be given to the complainant.

4. The Complaint Evaluation Board - The Community Relations Commission has determined that the CEB process would be viewed with much more respect by complainants if they are kept abreast of the progress of their cases and are allowed to attend the meetings at which the cases are discussed and bring witnesses. (Information on the progress of cases being investigated by the IID should also be made available to the charging party).

The Commission also suggests that this agency be represented at CEB meetings by the Director rather than by other staff members.

5. Police Community Councils - From the testimony presented by the Police Department on Friday, October 20th, it appears that a number of Police Department sponsored Community Councils function in police districts throughout the city. Their purpose seems to be to promote understanding between police officers and those in the community to which they are assigned. Members of the Community Relations Commission acknowledge the fact that they have a responsibility in helping to improve relations between citizens and police. For that reason, Commissioners have resolved to become active in Police Councils. While attending meetings, they will bring to council members problems and concerns which have been presented to them or to staff. Commissioners hope to play an

active role in the development of solutions to such problems.

Members of this Commission believe that some citizens are hesitant to attend meetings in a police precinct building. For that reason, it is suggested that at least some of the meetings be held in community facilities such as schools, churches, recreational facilities, etc.

6. Improving the perception of the Police Department by citizens -

The Commission has concluded that many persons are not really aware of the various areas of responsibility assumed by the members of the Baltimore City Police Force. Officers are responsible for counseling, mediation and referrals as well as more traditional policing activities.

Methods should be developed to give the public a more accurate view of the role of a "typical" police officer. Perhaps the local media can be involved in presenting this kind of information in an interesting and credible manner.

The Community Relations Commission is interested in working to obtain funds for pilot projects to test the validity and value of developing a specialized group of community relations personnel within the Police Department. Such a group would have the responsibility of responding to calls for assistance which require counseling, mediation, referral, etc., and would be an expansion of the functions now performed by the civil police community relations specialists. A corps of such persons should free officers to respond to more serious calls for assistance.

Funding should also be sought to look into the feasibility of increasing foot patrol officers. Such officers would be able to develop

a positive relationship with the people in a given neighborhood even when they are not performing specific police services.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Community Relations Commission offers its participation in achieving the suggestions and recommendations listed above. Our interest continues to be a maximizing of the positive relationship between the citizens of Baltimore City and the members of the city's police force.